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ABSTRACT

A study examined the general nature of the teamwork and beliefs of four "activists" (elementary school teachers in southwestern Michigan who were selected on the basis of their joint efforts to influence county-wide writing curriculum). Data included interviews, field notes, and documents gathered during the set-up and running of a Young Author's conference. Results indicated that the teachers engaged each other in the voluntary work so as to maintain a tradition in which curricular reforms could be promoted. Analysis of the teachers' experience indicates cognitive, affective, and social outcomes from the collaborative ventures. Unlike typical veteran teachers' opinions of more conventional staff development activities, the participants' own views on the question of the value of their collaborative experiences were consistently positive. Contains 23 references and 12 notes. A response from Marlene Bruno (one of the teachers) is attached. (RS)

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Teachers Collaboratively Writing About Their Curricular Activism

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Abstract: How social negotiations are conducted hold implications for staff developers interested in supplying veteran teachers with more individualized professional development experiences by allowing them greater responsibility for securing their own development. As exemplars, four elementary teachers who qualify as activists because of their joint efforts to influence county-wide writing curriculum were selected. This study examined the general nature of the four activists' teamwork and beliefs. For example, ways new ideas could be constructed and validated by the group were apparent. More generally, the study showed how the teachers engaged each other in the voluntary work so as to maintain a tradition in which curricular reforms could be promoted. The analysis of the teachers' experience indicated cognitive, affective and social outcomes from the collaborative ventures. Unlike typical veteran teachers' opinions of more conventional staff development activities, the participants' own views on the question of the value of their collaborative experiences were consistently positive.

Paper presented at the meeting of National Reading Conference, Charleston, SC on December 3, 1993.

Teachers Collaboratively Writing About Their Curricular Activism

The broadest purpose of this paper is to consider the value of collaboration as professional development for reform-oriented teachers in the later stages of career development. Huberman's (1989) research of 160 teachers has revealed some professional life cycles that have important implications for staff development. Of most interest in this country, with its aging corps of professionals, is the mid-career (and beyond) teachers' needs and tendencies. According to Huberman, there are multiple mid-career streams. For example, one of these streams he called *experimentation or activism* because it is characterized by teachers trying to improve the educational system (p. 37). Huberman's life cycle work provides a new way to understand teachers' development, and it follows that teachers in the middle to end of their career cycles who fit into a specific pattern of development could profit from alternative forms of staff development which fit their immediate goals. Professional development initiatives can and should be inaugurated by alliances of teachers (Anders & Richardson, 1991; Lytle & Fecho, 1991).

One way to identify successful human development interventions is to study what people are themselves choosing as learning experiences (Heath, 1993). When veteran teachers voluntarily tackle brand new kinds of professional challenges which involve reflecting upon their own practices, opportunities are present for observing the adult as on-going learner. A prime example involves teachers who for the first time decide to move beyond their oral local traditions to attempt written communication within the larger professional discourse community. Such voluntary risk taking and learning seeking is happening increasingly because many educators are calling for teachers to establish their voices within the professional arena (Cohn & Kottkamp, 1992; Cushman, 1992; Darling-Hammond, 1990; Elliott, 1985; Florio-Ruane, 1991). The organizing of a community literacy event represents another example of teachers stretching their own practices.

Four veteran elementary teachers who all belong to and are active in leading a southwestern Michigan reading council met in November 1992 to tape record a conversation. In Huberman's (1991) terms, these teachers abide in the "activism" stream; by maintaining the traditions of a local reading council and conducting an annual literacy event for children, parents and other teachers, these activists were influencing all of the local curriculums in at least three surrounding counties. Each year between 400 and 500 young authors attend a Sunday conference for kids with their guardians and numerous teachers; many other students, teachers, parents and principals are involved with the writing of compositions though they are not all in attendance at the conference. The specific topic of the recorded discussion of the teachers, who comprised what is known as the Conference Steering Committee, was the nine-year history of presenting a Young Authors' Celebration each spring. These workshops are offered to students of all the area K-8 schools. The steering committee intended that a transcript of their discussion would lead to a collaboratively-produced article on how others could organize such a student writing conference. The audience for this extension of their activism was a statewide professional organization, the Michigan Reading Association (MRA). Three of the teachers had not written for professional publication, and none had collaborated on a written publication.

Cochran-Smith (1991) has urged teachers to regard themselves as activists and to "reclaim their roles in the shaping of practice" (p. 280). When she speaks of "teaching against the grain," she intends for teachers to "work both *within* and *around* the culture of teaching and politics of schooling at their particular schools and within their larger school systems and communities" (p. 284). In so doing, teachers transform the social life of schools and intellectually construct the curriculum by considering the long-range effects of what and why they teach. According to one member of the Conference Steering Committee, these teachers, by establishing and maintaining a young authors' tradition, are acting on their belief that students need to write extended texts and have positive recognition for their compositions.

Interviews of the steering committee members established that the participants consciously strive to affect area schools—especially those where students otherwise complete no polished pieces of expressive writing. Ideally, the steering committee wishes to see students writing and sharing their compositions on a year-round basis—and they can point to specific districts and buildings where the writing instruction has gradually come to approach their vision...as well as point to schools where student writing opportunities are almost nonexistent. Each year the Young Authors' Conference organizers write a letter to all of the principals in several adjacent counties requesting participation in the literacy event. A recent letter stated:

Due to the overwhelming number of participants in the last several years, the Young Authors Steering Committee has decided to focus on specific grade levels this year. The 1993 Young Authors' Celebration Workshop will focus on grades K-3. We encourage teachers at the other grade levels to continue Young Authors activities in their own classrooms. (November 30, 1992)

This letter shows how the steering committee reaches out to affect the schools on a long-range basis, even attempting to influence the classrooms ineligible for the conference that particular year. Some schools respond by paying the nominal registration fees for all of their students to attend (so that parents are freed from this responsibility); others set up publishing centers staffed by parent volunteers to prepare books on an on-going basis for the Celebration. Students' writing includes a variety of genres including picture books, expository, autobiography, and various types of fictional narratives. Some classes have written poetry anthologies in which each class member has contributed verse or chapter books with students collaborating on novel-length stories. Thus, one way the Young Authors' Celebration shapes curriculum is by encouraging educators and parents to encourage students to write for the purpose of self-expression. To see how the collaborative participation in the Celebration and in the reading council benefited the teachers, I conducted a qualitative study.

The Study

The ways professionals conduct social negotiations, especially when colleagues seek to cause intradistrict curricular change, hold implications for staff developers interested in supplying veteran teachers with more individualization of professional development programs and more responsibility for choosing and shaping those experiences. The main question I posed was this: *When mid-career teachers collaborate, in what ways does the process qualify as effective staff development?* As I gathered and examined the data, I became interested in the sub-issue of how participants create and present new ideas—whether for an article or for a young authors' conference—so that they become accepted as part of the intracommunity tradition and legacy. This sub-issue connects with activism in that taking action is dependent upon producing intelligent ideas about what to do. The ways in which individuals interact professionally, without a rigid hierarchy, to create and maintain a tradition such as the Young Authors Celebration causes a discord with, and perhaps renders ridiculous, the conventional *supervision* that many mid-career teachers are receiving from their districts.

The professional relationship between the participants and me as researcher has lasted over 15 months. I began by analyzing a 30-minute taped discussion using discourse analysis theories and techniques (Cazden, 1988; Coulthard, 1992; Florio-Ruane, 1991; Tannen, 1989). I related my findings through the discourse analysis to the participants' article which was published in the spring of 1993 (Bruno, Bentham, Brininstool-Gazella & Burlington, 1993). I conducted sixty to ninety minute interviews of three participants. Additionally, during observations of writing sessions, the set-up of the conference, and the conference proper, field notes and documents were collected and later analyzed. Based on these data, interpretation of the extent to which this particular collaboration qualifies as a productive form of staff development for these individuals was guided by Dewey's (1938) theory of experience

framework: this involved consideration of whether participants had grown socially, cognitively and affectively.

The Activists

The four participants of this study are elementary teachers each with approximately 20 years of practicing in southwestern Michigan and each with a history of leadership both within the Tri-County Reading Council and within the council's Young Authors' Celebration Steering Committee. When asked to describe memorable in-service activities in interviews, the participants, rather than listing home-building events, listed activities which brought them into contact with practitioners from other school districts. They could recall few staff development sessions which dealt with composition and no activities which asked or advocated that teachers write. Asked to generally characterize communications within schools they have inhabited, the participants described agenda-structured staff meetings which typically lacked give and take not only between administrators and teachers but also between teachers themselves. The four have been trying to reduce the work of the young authors steering committee by getting school representatives to do more of the preparing, transporting and setting up of the student books. One participant explained that the ongoing drive for efficiency is partly intended to expand the influence of the program so that more students can be influenced by the positive feelings that creativity brings. A few introductory details about the individuals follow:

- Mary Elizabeth (Beth) Bentham is a teacher of grades one and two in a comparatively small district. She began in Tri-County nearly 20 years ago, early enough to remember discussion about the naming of the council. She has accepted chief leadership responsibility of the Young Authors' Celebration Workshop many times over the years.
- Karen Brininstool-Gazella¹, for 17 years a full-time first and second grade public school teacher, now runs the homework tutoring program (which specializes in reading and mathematics assistance) for the local Salvation Army. Like the others, she has been a long-time stabilizer of the reading council. She serves the 1993-94 Membership Chair.
- Marlene Bruno teaches kindergarten for a comparatively large school district where she has also served as a reading specialist. She had been a Michigan Reading Association (MRA) executive officer for six years and a state board member before that. As a member of the editorial review board of the *Michigan Reading Journal*, she was responsible for calling and running the writing meetings of the four collaborators. She is the 1993-94 president of Tri-County and was one of the originators of a noncompetitive conference.
- Karen Burlington is a reading specialist from a small district who spends most of her instructional time in teachers' classrooms. Her participation in Tri-County goes back to the early days of the 20-year-old council. She obtained release time from her district to help begin the Young Authors' Conference and also helped to establish a noncompetitive authoring tradition.

The Activists' Involvement

The transcript of the drafting meeting reveals the close involvement of the Young Authors Celebration organizers. Tannen (1989) defines involvement as "internal even emotional connection individuals feel which binds them to other people as well as to places, things, activities, ideas, memories and words" (p.12). An extremely important construct in the study of discourse, involvement is a social achievement or "joint production," Tannen argues. She also asserts that during involvement an aesthetic response, defined as "an emergent sense of coherence" (p. 13), creates an "emotional experience of insight" (p. 13) which allows understanding of meaning. Karen G. used the term *connections* to refer to the new insights that the steering committee enabled. Marlene spoke of the importance of "give and take" between individuals, and Beth, impressed by the group's fluid talk and free and easy turn-

¹ I will refer to her as Karen G. (for Gazella) in this paper and use "Karen B." to identify the other Karen.

taking as she helped me interpret the recorded tape, noted that the activists "build on each others' ideas and [also] go off on our own with our own thoughts."

The teachers' involvement with each other was their activism: it was their way of influencing curriculum. In the taping of their conversation and its later transformation into print, the teachers jointly set down a legacy of ideas, activities, memories and specialized vocabulary. Huberman (1989, 1992) showed that teachers who avoid involvement in activism most often wind up more content than those who risk joint production. Such teachers are primarily bound to their students or to their own pedagogy and avoid collegial involvement. In contrast, one participant in this study, Karen G., has "found that contact with other people in the teaching profession has been for me one of the best parts of teaching." For her, learning and improvement typically begin when she admits that she is not content with a particular aspect of her practice. Next, she shares her discontent with a well-chosen colleague, avoiding those principals who she has seen record teachers' "admissions of weakness" in year-end evaluations. Karen's sharing of her problem or dissatisfaction can lead to finding more effective pedagogical approaches. Several years ago when Karen expressed her dissatisfaction with her math instruction to a principal from a nearby district, she was invited to participate in a hands-on math workshop, becoming the first person in her district to explore what later became a popular program. In Karen's view, such *sharing* of needs and procedures in itself counts as staff development.

The participants in the young authors' tradition operate in the same way that Karen did when she identified a problem. Karen recalled, and the teachers' article confirms, that the group had identified a dissatisfaction with the competitive nature of the forerunner of Young Authors' Celebration. They sat down to discuss their discontent and to brainstorm new formats that "would be more meaningful to the kids," Karen said, "and would include more kids." She continued, "I don't think any of us had a concept of where we wanted to go. We didn't like what was happening at that point.... An hour and a half later we had a basic idea of what we wanted to do." Another participant indicated that she was originally motivated to become deeply involved with the Young Authors' Celebration specifically because of her ideas on how to make the event more effective. Thus, jointly identified rough areas are addressed through involvement.

Supplying details and sharing images, even if tentative, are ways of expressing involvement (Tannen, 1989). In the following joint-produced list of details about presenters, the enthusiastic involvement of the participants is evident in the music-like patterns and liberal inclusion of details:

Marlene:	Our presenters are not necessarily from the ranks of teachers but are people in the community that have an expertise in a certain area. (breath)
Beth:	Scout leaders, librarians, ...
Karen B:	Radio We even had radio news .
Beth:	Oh, that was <i>wonderful!</i> [whispering]
Karen B:	We had Bob Dewitt.
Beth:	Yes.
Karen B:	Last year. He was fantastic!
Karen G?:	He had them write news stories!
Beth:	He did!
Karen G?:	And then...

Key

	Overlapping speech
...	Pausing
We	Repeated words
→	Speeding up
↗	Tone raising
↘	Tone falling
—	Emphasized
BIG	Loud volume
Tiny	Soft volume

Karen B: And he had it on the news too!

Beth: Yes.

Marlene: Yes.

?: Oh, neat!

Marlene: I'm, well you guys got more press last year than we've ever had.

Karen G?: Well..

Karen B: It was wonderful.

Karen G?: Radio press.

(November 10, 1992)

The list of presenters was socially constructed by at least three of the four participants.² It is produced with a swift pace, lots of positive evaluation, and virtually no disfluency. It seems enthusiastic and celebratory. When Beth whispered, "Oh that was wonderful!", her emotional experience seemed triggered by shared images of last year's conference. Karen B. became more and more enthusiastic, building up to "fantastic" and later echoing Beth's "wonderful" to express joint involvement.

The list's function in the context of the article will be to inform readers, but in the immediate context, it fulfills other functions. It provides rapport and triggers emotion as evidenced by the "response cries" that follow (Tannen, 1989). The details supplied by various members paint a scene and leads to "narratizing" together which furthers the writing of the article and also cements the traditions of the conference (Tannen, 1989). Support for this cementing of traditions is seen in the radio press's repeated inclusion in the 1993 conference which followed this conversation; one of the members reported to me that the group was thrilled with the radio coverage again in 1993.

In my field notes I observed that the four participants are intimate acquaintances, but their involvement was primarily for the purpose of professional activism.

During the [revision] work, Marlene was dealing with the hospitalization of someone she cares about. The group was somewhat supportive—making suggestions about who to call at the hospital since the visiting hours were over. However, the group seemed to stop its relationships at a point. These are not really best friends working together. They are professionals who are friendly and caring but revel more in shared group experiences (such as the time group members' teenagers assisted them) than in individual interpersonal encounters.

(Field notes, 4/9/93)

Even though three of the four members live within a mile of each other, they meet each other almost exclusively as members of the reading council, not as best friends. This boundary on the involvement is important to acknowledge because it demonstrates that the group members are not arranging the young authors' celebration for the purpose of having their social needs met: the involvement is primarily a professional activism. Lacking a hierarchy such as those in most institutional settings, these teachers need to create and sustain engagement by means of talk; in particular, they need to talk about the conference's problems, or rough spots, so that they can improve the traditions of the literacy event and reach more students.

² Some speeches could not be heard well enough to determine who spoke, probably all four voiced involvement.

Ideas of Activists

How Ideas Get Stated

Activism is dependent upon new ideas. While the ideas which emerged during the participants' discussion were not earth shaking (even for the participants), something can be learned about idea generation in relation to professional development. How more revolutionary ideas are constructed and debated by a group such as this one may be quite different and should be the subject of another study. Still, most ideas presented to most groups are modifications, stemming from small problems, rather than transformations (such as changing from a contest to a celebration). Thus, because the presentation and acceptance of change in relation to relatively minor matters is standard fare, these activities are of significance. Teachers' activism typically involve many matters which could be classified as the nitty gritty of educational policy making but which matter greatly in establishing a climate for learning.

The first idea concerned a policy change for the upcoming conference as well as a point for the article which was under construction. The transcript follows:

Mar: The books are displayed on tables, by school districts. So, that, they [participants] know where to go to find their particular books. And then, also if they're looking for friends' from other districts or other buildings they know where to go.³
Um...³

Beth: I *just had* a brilliant idea.⁴

Mar: There is..refreshments, or there are refreshments that are provided for by the college still. Usually cookies and a juice of some sort.

Beth: [Loud slow exhale—seems to be Beth] I *just thought* of door..the door prize, we could ask them, at the last session...this is stupid...last session, *just take your name tag off and put it in the hat*.⁵

Karen B.: The hat for the door prize.

Beth: And that would be for the door prize.

Mar: Oh—⁶. And then we just notify them.

Beth: Because we, we gave out little slips of paper the last time..in the sessions..

Mar: We've always done that.

Beth: No. We did it in the sessions, remember? I ran that by you...

Karen B.: We gave them out..

Beth: Some of the people didn't get them handed in or didn't collect them before the first session left. That would be perfect.

Mar: They could *just take their name tag off*,

Beth: *just take their name tag off*

³ Details supplied by Karen B. and Marlene create an important scene for the paper.

⁴ Does the spontaneousness of the thought make it more acceptable for some reason? Could she be saying that the group is responsible for inspiring her idea? Note the repetition of "just" meaning "without premeditation."

⁵ Note signs of cognitive load: disfluency and lack of coherence to main flow of discussion. This second use of "just" to mean "simple" implies that simple is desirable. Also consider another double entendre—"just" meaning "equitable" fits with the group's belief system and the task at hand of awarding prizes. To consider the symbolism of "hat" replacing *box* and *ballot* here, see page 135 in Tannen (1989) on images.

⁶ Elongated vowel expresses dawning comprehension. The idea is being gradually joint-constructed by the group.

Mar: put it in the box.

Beth: Even if they leave at the, before the end of the second session, *just* have, *just* have the presenters say initially, "Please, you know, make sure that your name tag gets _____ [in the box?]" and we'll have one at the door. (November 10, 1992)

I did not understand the importance of the workshop name tags until I attended the 1993 conference. These tags not only show that students have registered and paid the fee, they also tell students which two of their requested conference sessions they have drawn and where those sessions are being held. Since there is no printed program, it would be difficult to run a conference which revolves around student choice of sessions without the name tags. In this excerpt, Beth was proposing to simplify the conference workload one step, as well as reduce supply usage, by employing the name tag for yet another purpose. In keeping the work and the costs to a minimum, the members are not only attempting to expand their influence but are also helping the activism survive amidst the multitude of demands on people's time and institutions' resources.

The seeds of Beth's idea may have been sown during the extended conversation on equitable giving, an important theme in the entire transcript of the conversation.⁷ In a sense, the entire conference is a gift, given equally to all the children of the surrounding counties. But since fees collected exceed the customary expenses, the organizers are able to give some of the funds back to the children in the form of books and camp scholarships. The significance of these gifts may be that they are extensions of the influence of the conference: students read the books all year around, and students attend the literary camp in the summer, which amounts to supplemental curriculum. While such gifts may seem modest, we do not know exactly what it is that adults do which turns a person toward being a published writer or an avid reader. Chances are that whatever it is, it affects attitudes more than skills. Marlene, Beth and Karen each emphasized the affective outcomes of the Celebration during interviews.

In my notes, I summarized some events which related to the new idea about name tags: "...when Beth heard that her innovation for the prize drawing had been written into the group's paper, she enthused in a pleased tone, "Ooh, we are actually going to use my idea!" (Fieldnotes, April 9, 1993). A week or two later she referred to the idea while talking to Marlene and me about the article, calling the use of the name tags as raffle tickets "such a good idea" (Fieldnotes, April 18, 1993) but no longer claiming the idea as hers. I will return to consideration of this idea's production and adoption shortly.

The second idea is expressed briefly and discussed only momentarily. Marlene comes up with the statement for the idea, though its seeds may have been sown jointly.

Beth: ...we need to get, we have many more things we need to talk about.

Mar: Yeah.

Beth: The registration form. →It, you, it, that's a work in itself.

Mar: Right—→

Beth: The registration form *lists*...some background information about the, the celebration [sustained note], the times, the..the places and then what's going to be happening, →and then *lists* the print centers.

Mar: [interrupting] We could have a *little copy* of it in the..[article]

⁷ The likelihood of this is somewhat supported by Beth's request that I look within the transcript for seeds of her idea. Karen B. has remarked that the idea's origin and later acceptance may be connected with members' participation in similar drawings at professional conferences. It strikes me as important that these teachers are attempting to recreate their professional development activities for their students, for it suggests that the teachers value staff development which allows them choices, mobility, as well as giving and sharing.

Beth: Yeah, we should. Like a mini-copy.⁸

Mar: mmhu⁹

Karen B: That's a good idea.

Beth: Lists the presenters¹⁰, um—

Mar: And their, and..

Beth: see photo. [laughing]

(November 10, 1992)

Sometimes an idea is self-praised to let others know that it is something that has a strong appeal for the speaker. Beth did this when she thought of the name tag idea. She overstates her case, using *brilliant* to get people's close attention. Later she says the idea would be "perfect."

More subtle markers include the use of special tones of voice, quickened speeds, or unusual timings (e.g., interrupting someone, as Marlene does with her idea, shows that the norm of polite turn-taking is being violated because of an exciting—almost uncontrollable—idea).

Use of ellipsis is one way for a speaker to cause others to consider an idea (Tannen, 1989). By leaving an idea only partially expressed, a speaker forces others to infer meaning. This may be a psychological technique for helping others develop ownership of an idea—for indeed, they are more aware of helping to construct the idea (some argue that all ideas are co-constructed) than when they hear a complete, ready-made idea. Marlene, in the second transcript, may be using this strategy or she may simply have been interrupted because her idea is so stimulating. At any rate, she never actually completes the sentence or the idea, but it is well communicated to group members anyway, judging from the shadowing or echoing which takes place. Beth has just called the group's registration form "a work," so Marlene could be seen as picking up on Beth's idea rather than initiating a whole new idea. This could be an example of a group-constructed idea.

Evidence That an Idea Has Been Accepted

Of course the best evidence that an idea has gained acceptance is that the idea is implemented over a period of years. Both of the ideas studied here won instant recognition and were implemented as soon as possible. Marlene's idea was an idea that could be realized only once. The name tag idea could be returned to service again.

Other evidence that group members can use to gauge to what extent their ideas are winning acceptance includes (a) direct comments from other members, (b) an explosion of talk, (c) a variation of turn-taking norms to show engagement and excitement, (d) a brightening of tone on the part of respondents and the use of stress, (e) echoing and paraphrasing, and (f) the extension of the idea through addition of an analogy, details, or related ideas.

Direct comments that an idea is sound occurred in the example of printing the forms. Karen B. simply says, "That's a good idea." In the example of the name tag, no one comments directly on the idea, but directly commenting is not the only way to validate an idea.

If the group explodes into talk such that there is a lot of overlapping speech, it tells the speaker that her idea is at least stimulating. This happened in both the examples. This can be contrasted with the response when someone puts forth an idea that is unfavorable. For instance, when Marlene mentions that spending money has accompanied the summer camp

⁸Is "mini" meant to downplay the idea at all? Probably not, since Marlene used the word "little"; it appears to be a repetition (revoicing) at the level of paraphrase, for Beth says that she supports the idea. Later she supplied the forms for the mini-copies.

⁹Assenting that her idea has been understood.

¹⁰Trying to reestablish her train of thought from before the new idea.

prize, Beth quickens her rate of speech and says, "We didn't give spending money this year." There is no outburst of positive comments or responses to Marlene's idea, so she simply replies, "Oh. Okay."

Turn taking norms can fall by the wayside when a good idea is introduced. For example, Marlene interrupts Beth to say that a little copy of the conference forms could be printed in the journal. Then others interrupt Marlene to validate the idea. In both cases, the interruptions were not interpreted as "rude" because of the special norms associated with proposing ideas. On the other hand, a person with an interesting idea may hold the floor longer than normal, as was the case when Beth presented her name tag suggestion. She later told me that this was not a preconceived idea, but one that needed to be constructed outloud; the extra-long turn allowed her to think it through and present it in an acceptable way.

Another indicator of the acceptance of an idea is a brightening of the respondents' vocal tones or other use of emphasis such as accent. When Marlene submits her idea, Beth both brightens her tone and stresses the word *should* as she concurs, "Yeah we should." This brightening and energizing of tone was also notable in the response to Beth's idea. It can be interpreted as a sign of the pleasurable aesthetic response which accompanies comprehension of an idea.

Another indication that an idea is winning support is the repetition of key words and paraphrasing. This tape is loaded with speeches which poetically echo other speeches. After Beth reports her idea ("...just take your name tag off and put it in the hat."), Karen B. repeats her last two words in an attempt to clarify whether she has understood ("The hat for the door prize."). A few seconds later Marlene gets in on the repetition ("...just take their name tag off") and Beth verifies that she, too, has understood the idea (just take their name tag off."). When Marlene states her idea about including the forms in the article, Beth responds immediately with near repetition, merely substituting *mini* for *little*. Combined with her brightened tone, Beth's paraphrasing represents validation of Marlene's idea.

Allo-repetition, or other repetition is sometimes delayed by a split second and sometimes simultaneous or choral. This musical sign of involvement functions in this conversation in several ways. It builds rapport. The ability to infer and to foresee how a conversation will go are important signs of involvement (Gumperz, cited in Tannen, 1989). Simultaneous allo-repetition may be the ultimate sign that the participants can indeed build coherence and thus experience aesthetic insight together. Another function of allo-repetition is validation of details. This is important as the teachers strive to accurately record their history: nine years is a lot of time to remember, so the members rely on each other's memories. They also must check each other's interpretations of the events. Allo-repetition may simply be used for its satisfying sense of involvement, too.

A final way members validate ideas is through the extension of the idea. By adding onto an idea, one is saying that it is an idea worth expanding. Surprisingly, this technique is not used in either of these examples. This may be due to the agreed upon nature of the speech event: participants were assembled to recall the past for the purpose of writing an article not to construct new ideas. While new ideas that occurred during the other task were briefly shared so as not to be lost, elaboration would have taken the teachers too far off task.

Joint Ownership Helps Ideas Grow

To see an idea take life, it is necessary to give the idea to the group. Beth does this almost immediately when she thinks of the name tag idea. She begins in the first person by saying, "I just thought of door...the door prize..." Her disfluency may be caused by the stress of owning an idea, for if the idea is not picked up by the group, it could be interpreted as a partial rejection of the speaker, which could be painful and counterproductive. Beth quickly switches to the second person, giving the idea to the group: "the door prize, we could ask them at the last session..." She continues in the second person throughout the rest of her idea promotion. By giving the idea to the group, she encourages others to invest in the idea and identify with it. If

such an idea is rejected, which is less likely once the group members begin to think of it as OUR idea, rejection is more of a shared outcome—that is, an idea generator can, with ego intact, rationalize, “together we dispensed with our idea for shared reasons.”

I overheard a different instance of innovation acceptance during the set-up of the Young Authors' Celebration. As Karen G. tied helium balloons on to the presenters' bags of materials, she said to Beth, “I forgot, whose idea were the balloons. Was it my idea?” This is further support for the assertion that ideas are given to the group: Karen G. cannot remember whether she is responsible for the innovation of the balloons. People feel worthy when they have contributed a good idea to an organization, but when the ideas are communally shared, it is sometimes impossible to say how the seeds of an idea were sown, who first expressed the idea, and who helped revise. That the ownership of ideas is less important than the conference tradition itself suggests that the participants are involved not for personal glory but for higher professional reasons.

Many scholars argue that ideas are never individual in nature (Bakhtin, 1981; Erickson, 1982; Newman & Cole, 1989). Because of the social nature of cognition, ideas emerge from groups. When asked to account for the origins of her idea, Beth told me to look within the earlier discussion for the seeds of her idea. How ideas emerge in conversation tells a lot about a group. If members compete for status via ownership of ideas, a much different conversation will occur than if they agree to be involved as co-equals.

These teachers seek to organize a noncompetitive literacy event, something quite different from the contests of the past where only one student from a school was declared a winner. The organizers are generally noncompetitive themselves as many American women are (Tannen, 1990). For example, the four regularly reconfigure themselves so that leadership passes back and forth. In the joint article, Marlene associates their progress with this “changing of leadership” (p. 8). Her valuing of cooperative leadership lends support to the assertion that the group's ideas are jointly produced and owned.

It is also significant that these teachers are attempting to recreate their professional development activities for their students. Karen stated that the steering committee's efforts to design a noncompetitive format grew from an intent to create something similar to what they themselves enjoyed—professional conferences. They wanted students to have choices about what language arts topics they would consider. This suggests that the teachers value staff development which allows them choices, mobility, as well as giving and sharing.

Collaborative Events

The Article Takes Shape: Audience and Metalinguistics

During the taped conversation which the participants used to initiate their article, the speakers had two audiences. The immediate audience was the four partners in the room who have a partially shared history in that they have been working together in various configurations over the past nine years. The more distant audience was the readership of the statewide journal—a body of primarily elementary teachers (but also reading specialists, principals and college instructors) some of whom share a schema because they also conduct young authors' conferences.

Since the speakers were composing an article but also conferring with each other to get their distant history straight and at the same time inventing new ideas for future use, there is a heavy metalinguistic load. This resulted in some disfluencies and some lexical replacements. For instance, as Beth described the prize drawing, the following exchange occurred.

Beth: In a door prize drawing. Older boys and girls were able to attend a...

Mar: We had two. Didn't we?

Beth: ...a local language arts, summer language arts camp, and we gave three or four,

this year, I think, three or four...

Beth, Marlene, Karen B: Scholarships.¹¹

Karen B: Scholarships. And...

(November 10, 1992)

Beth corrects herself to add the detail about summer, suggesting that there is something significant about extending the curriculum into the summer months which should be included in the article. In addition to displaying the handling of the mental load, this excerpt shows how the participants routinely helped each other through the pressure of composing aloud. The word *scholarships* is pronounced on beat by three individuals, who despite the cognitive load for listeners as well as speakers are involved enough, because of past shared experiences, to know exactly what to anticipate in this conversation.

In the end, what the four writers had to do was narrativize their experience, selecting only the most meaningful events and points for a short, coherent article. To accomplish this, they had to work together. Since none of them had seen every step along the trip, none of them could write this article alone. They relied on the joint authorship to portray the trials and triumphs of being a curricular activist.

The participants were excited (as evidenced by smiles, jokes, laughter and fluent speech), as they revised their article about the possibilities of collaboratively presenting their ideas at state and/or international conferences next year. To do so would extend their activism to other parts of the country. Their optimism and enthusiasm about these professional development possibilities contrasted sharply with more typical all-school (one size fits all) staff development programs and obligatory school improvement projects. In interviews, Marlene and Beth each contrasted the comfortable and democratic communication of their group with the more hierarchical and agenda-organized talk of school staff meetings.

The steering committee was busier than usual during the spring of 1993 because their article was materializing at the same time that the Celebration work was culminating. The four went over the transcript and decided which member would rewrite each part. The paper was kept in a dialogue form to symbolize the collaboration needed to conduct a young authors' conference. Once all the parts were ready, Marlene pieced them together in an order. Then a revision meeting was held—which I attended. The revised paper was retyped and sent to individuals for another round of suggestions. On May 2, 1993, Marlene finished the final draft. The article was published in the *Michigan Reading Journal*, which I edit, in the summer of 1993.

The Successful 1993 Young Authors' Celebration

The local newspaper and radio station covered the Celebration again in April, 1993, reporting that over 600 children in grades K-3 had signed up. Among the 31 sessions was one called "Music and Imagination" that I did with Marlene: we sang songs and played guitar, getting the children to make up verses about skunks, snakes, and other critters. We were not as popular as the mummy session or the pop-up books. I photographed children reading their books with their parents and friends. My brother and sister-in-law brought their two sons and used their video camera to document the mixture of ethnicities, ages and personalities present. Cookie in hand, a principal zoomed around the intimate pairings of people sharing printed stories in the bright hall, looking for book ideas to take back to his building.

The four organizers, dressed up and smiling, posed for pictures and enjoyed the fruits of their labor. It was another successful Celebration because it had resulted in a lot of collateral learning for students: messages about the fulfillment of self-expression and the excitement of creativity were readily available. All of the books would be returned to the schools from which they had come, but they all went back with colorful ribbons, showing that writing can result in

¹¹ "Scholarships" is spoken in chorus.

something other than red ink. A reason to write, even if it only happened once a year, was supplied by the members of the local reading council. The four find this to be reason enough to maintain the tradition of the Young Authors' Celebration. Even though the name tag idea had turned out pretty well, members could already see ways to improve upon it.

Self-Selected Activism as Professional Development

If collaboration is to be considered a quality form of staff development, there must be reason to think it provides individuals with significant growth. Duke (1993) defines professional growth as more than *learning*:

While learning may represent the acquisition of new knowledge, growth implies the transformation of knowledge into the development of the individual. Growth is qualitative change, movement to a new level of understanding, the realization of a sense of efficacy not previously enjoyed. (p. 703)

Dewey (1938) would take this a bit further by applying his principle of continuity: "...when and only when development in a particular line conduces to continuing growth does it answer to the criterion of education as growing." (p. 36). Dewey's conclusion is that evaluation of educational experience must focus primarily on what new understandings the learner transfers from the present situation to subsequent experiences. I will use Dewey's theory of experience to critique the Young Authors' Celebration collaborations as professional development which I claim is representative of an important variety of self-selected education for professionals who have stabilized their careers and need mechanisms to keep from becoming stale.

First, do the teachers learn and grow *during* the experience? During the meetings with colleagues to discuss the article and the Celebration, the teachers did hear about other teacher's classrooms and pedagogical approaches. Merely hearing about these ideas does not necessarily constitute growth, however; if the teachers simply use others' words to validate their current way of thinking, they could remain in a rut. Dewey's progressive philosophy called for guiding the whole person, and this professional development responds to that call in at least three ways. During the experience of meeting to plan, the work strengthened people's social connections, it built their cognitive powers, and it augmented people affectively.

As Dewey's (1938) work on *social control* asserts, education is only realized to the extent that individuals form a community and develop a discourse to communicate appropriately. There is strong evidence that these participants have created as a community: teachers not only have met together regularly for seven years or more, they have built their own terms to accomplish the work. Their discourse includes terms such as *slotting*, *pop-up books*, *radio news*, *name tag* and others which carry special meaning for insiders.

Immediate social benefits result from curricular activism. Because the most meaningful professional growth opportunities involve the possibility of failure, peer support, with its byproduct of peer bonding, is helpful in alleviating anxieties which prevent teachers from creating personal growth goals (Duke, 1993). As stated earlier, the participants of this study are not highly active socially with each other except as members of a team seeking the curricular advancement of more student writing and more meaningful student writing. Nevertheless, their collaboration provides aesthetic benefits as witnessed during the recollecting of the radio news. Furthermore, the general involvement seen in the members' interaction is indicative of powerful social cohesion. Beth called participation in planning the young authors' conference both "fun" and personally and professionally "fulfilling" (Fieldnotes, April 9, 1993).

Interviews also highlighted the social benefits of activism: Karen G. noted that writing as a group was much less intimidating than individually writing a similar professional article would have been. Though writing a professional article had been a lifelong goal for Karen, she had never asserted herself in print until the group decided to write together. She explained this lack of active pursuit of a goal as follows: "Professors write those articles, or reading consultants

write those articles...people with secretaries write those articles." Though she regarded time as a big obstacle to teachers writing together, she also admitted that she did not feel enough ownership of ideas to write them up. Karen, who also has served in statewide union activities, is motivated to travel outside district boundaries in order to be stimulated by the curricular ideas of other educators, relationships she called the "best part of teaching." However, once she has socially constructed ideas with others, for instance by recreating others' instructional programs in her classroom, Karen is unwilling to claim the outcomes as anything unique or better.

Karen's experiences help show that the immediate *cognitive* benefits of teamwork are related to the social benefits. Tannen's (1989) definition of the social achievement of involvement includes the creation of emotional experiences in which new insight is gained. In my examples of new ideas or insights, though they are not revolutionary conceptualizations, I have shown the explosion of excited talk which I believe is related to an emerging sense of coherence for the group. Part of the cognitive growth in this situation revolves around the writing of a professional article, which three of the four are attempting for the first time. If insight is taking place and new ideas are being generated as the organizers work to become authors themselves, they are indeed moving to a new level of understanding and efficacy, meeting Duke's (1993) definition of growth. However, what if the writing is removed from the experience—does growth still accrue from collaborative activism?

Oja (1991) listed focal points for establishing staff development projects characterized by developmental growth, and her work lends credence to the probability of participants' cognitive growth through these instances of curricular activism. Oja found that peer supervision and advising, that teachers taking on more complex roles, and that a supportive environment lead to cognitive growth. All of these conditions were part of the reading council's structures, for they counseled and supported each other as they took on their complicated activist roles. Beth Karen G. and Marlene all reported being brought to their multiple roles within Tri-County and the Celebration by nurturing teachers in their locales who were already involved.

Because these teachers are entitled to set their own purposes within the organization, the teachers' opportunities to grow cognitively are increased (Dewey, 1938). In explaining her reasons for serving as an officer of the local reading council, Karen G. used the word "power" to refer to her ability to get her own learning needs met by functioning as an activist. As an example, she stated that if she wants to learn something new about teaching writing, she can use her position to influence the board to bring in a speaker on that topic. Partly because of the lack of in-service in the first four years of her career—when Karen said teachers were given 30 pencils, 30 math books and 30 reading books and little else, she took to using professional organizations such as MRA and Tri-County Reading Council as "personal means of in-service" to keep her knowledge about teaching current. Beth reported a similar history but also brought out, as did Marlene, a feeling of having something to contribute to the professional organization. This self-efficacy leads to growth, Marlene indicated, because contributing (giving) is more active than receiving (as is customary for most in-service experiences).

Paradoxically, professional growth in the *affective* domain can take the form both of increasing independence and of increasing interdependence. The organizers of the Young Authors' Celebration are becoming more interdependent in that they have established an annual tradition that no one person can execute alone. All must work to carry on the routines which make up the tradition, such as slotting students into sessions, setting policy that protects people's writing, and so on. Also, as we have seen, the organizers must work together to construct new ideas. Knowing how to transplant the seedlings of ideas which spring up from the group, and knowing how to bring those seedlings to full flower are interdependent accomplishments of a complex nature. But in another way, the participants are becoming more independent, for they are not only growing professionally—unlike many teachers—but doing so without the assistance of their home districts. They have also learned to put on a Celebration without thinking it necessary to invite in a famous speaker. Both the ability to rely on the

group and the ability to break away from the leaders in their home districts and experts from afar display these teachers increasing self-efficacy. To the extent that they, as individuals, realize their newly manufactured interdependence and independence, they can be said to have improved their own feelings of self worth.

Conclusion

The teachers I have described are representative of a somewhat larger group of professionals who have networked with each other in voluntary work to maintain a 20-year tradition in which curricular reform could be promoted. My study revealed the general nature of these activists' teamwork and beliefs. The process moves along through the identification of problems, the brainstorming and refining of solutions, the application of interventions, and then the evaluation of the interventions. Such a process is similar to the classroom "tinkering" which teachers use spontaneously to test, improve and derive pleasure from their work" (Huberman, 1992, p. 138) and thereby supports Huberman's notion that effective staff development coheres with actual classroom practice. In collaborative work, however, teachers need a procedure for presenting and validating new ideas. This procedure exists because of a communication style marked by close involvement. Within what Marlene called the "comfortable" environment established through involvement, several norms exist for advancing ideas. The basic way to give birth to an idea is to give the idea to the group. Beth did that when she realized the advantages of using the name tags for the prize drawings, and Marlene did the same when she had a suggestion for the journal article. Available techniques include the use of self-praise, overstatement, unusual vocal tones, unusual syncopation, and quickened pace to first attract people's closest attention; ellipsis to urge others to make inferences and take ownership; and unusual turn-taking norms such as interrupting or holding the floor longer than customary to get people thinking in a particular way.

When teachers are allowed to communicate and learn in their own ways and by their own choice, staff development has a good chance to succeed. By way of example, this analysis of four teachers' experiences indicated cognitive, affective and social outcomes from the collaborative venture. Unlike typical veteran teacher opinions of more conventional staff development activities, the participants' own views of the value of their experiences were consistently positive. Not only has the literacy event been reliably staged for nearly a decade, the teachers speak of the event as personally and professionally satisfying and of the collaboratively published article as fulfillment of their lifelong goals.

These teachers have grown socially, cognitively and affectively in the immediate experiences of producing a paper on the Young Authors' Celebration and of actually organizing the Celebration. More important than the teacher's present experiences, however, (and in Dewey's view inseparable in terms of learning) is the future. Whether the teachers continue learning in future situations as a result of these staff development experiences is a critical question. Guided by Dewey's (1938) theory of experience, my interpretation of the group's recorded history¹² is that the interaction of the teacher's own inner conditions (particularly desire to spread the word and improve the event, and satisfaction with seeing rising student, parent, and educator interest in writing) with the external conditions (particularly the support of peers) results in continued growth. Success with one endeavor may result in future attempts to accomplish other challenging goals: the writing of the article growing out of the Celebration is a good example; the professional presentations the teachers want to grow out of the article is another. Greene (1991) also would expect collateral learning in the long run from a professional development operation such as organizing a young authors' event:

It is when teachers are together as persons, according to norms and principles they have freely chosen, that interest becomes intensified and commitments are

¹² Huberman (1992) would likely see the teachers' writing as a crucial means of teacher data collection before, during and after the "tinkering."

made. And this may open pathways to expanded landscapes, richer ways of being human.... (p. 13)

Someone as optimistic as Greene is about teachers' abilities to "choose themselves anew," (p. 12) might predict that teachers involved with the Young Authors' Celebration will establish other curricular projects independent of the steering committee, and that some might even teach others within their home districts how to construct ideas and traditions. The experiences of sharing communication about problems associated with the conference can lead to increased comfort and new occasions for the sharing of other curricular problems. The courage to engage in such "give and take" is a valuable attribute because it represents the ability to manage one's own professional development. As this valuable future growth occurs, the activism, in addition to improving learning opportunities for students, will have fulfilled all of Dewey's obligations for qualifying as meaningful professional development.

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Response to this paper from Marlene Bruno (February 6, 1994)

I never thought of myself as an activist until Robert started talking about writing this paper. When he first asked me how I felt about his using the term *activist*, I was initially not thrilled. I have always associated the word *activist* with unruly, loud, extremists. As we continued to talk about the term, I came to see it in a positive light and decided I did not mind being referred to as an activist.

After reading the draft of the paper, I began thinking about the impact Young Authors has made on the community. The attendance at the Celebration has increased to the point that it became necessary to split the K-8 group into two groups: we now have grades K-3 one year and 3-8 the following. Not only do teachers and principals look for the Young Authors information to come each winter, but they are supportive about appointing staff members as representatives for their buildings.

In my own district, each of three elementary buildings has added a publishing center. The centers are staffed by parents and headed by teachers. These centers first came about as a result of parent help needed to type manuscripts for the Young Authors' Celebration. Eventually the centers became year-round necessities to handle the number of books the children are writing.